

Marietta University Enhancement District

Livable Centers Initiative Study

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC KICK-OFF MEETING

Life University – CCE Building

December 13, 2012, 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm

Overview

The City of Marietta, in partnership with Life University (Life) and Southern Polytechnic State University (SPSU), kicked off the Marietta University Enhancement District Livable Centers Initiative (MU2 LCI) study on December 13, 2012. The partners held the public kick-off meeting at Life's Center for Chiropractic Education Building from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Approximately 75 community members, representing the Life, SPSU, area businesses and agencies, and the overall Marietta community, attended.

Attendees enjoyed refreshments graciously provided by Life University while reviewing baseline assessment materials prior to formal introductions and a presentation by the study team. The meeting ended with a lively brainstorming session. Attendees identified the area's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The following pages provide a summary of meeting proceedings and the discussion that occurred.

The next study meeting will take place January 15, 2013 at SPSU's Student Center from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm. An important study survey will be released the same day. Community members are encouraged to review material and participate via the study website: WWW.MU2LCI.COM.



Above: Entrance to CCE Building at Life University.
Below: Discussion prior to meeting.

Introductions

Kyethea Clark, Project Manager with the City of Marietta, welcomed attendees to the meeting. The study was made possible by a grant from the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC). The study's goal is to develop a strategic plan for transforming the area around SPSU and Life into a more vibrant corridor with stronger live/work/play and multi-modal attributes. It is being led by a Project Management Team (including Life, SPSU, the City, ARC, and consulting team) and a Core Stakeholder Team, including leadership from the area's many stakeholder groups.

An introductory video coordinated by the City, Life, and SPSU and featuring the presidents of the two universities as well as the City Manager was shown to orient attendees to the study goals and aspirations. The leaders offered insight on the importance of the study for shaping the area's future.

Presentation

Introductions were followed by a presentation by the consulting team. Jim Summerbell with Jacobs gave an overview of the study process, goals, and schedule followed by an overview of the existing conditions and trends in the study area. The analysis included an assessment of existing and future land use policy as well as the area's transportation network and existing design characteristics. The existing conditions in the study area were presented from the perspective of the area's six subareas, each with unique qualities and opportunities.



Jim highlighted ingredients of successful college communities. Attendees were asked what comes to mind when they think of a great college town. Participants identified Athens, GA, Tuscaloosa, AL, and Morgantown, WV.

Rick Padgett with Huntley Partners gave an overview of current market conditions and demand projections. This portion included a discussion of potential markets, area demographics and types of potential development that could occur in the future.

Questions? Comments!

Attendees were invited to ask questions and provide general feedback after the presentation. Several questions were raised, as documented below:

- How does the apartment market compare to other college towns? Where will housing be provided?
 - A comparison of the market to other college towns has not been made. The City currently has an over abundance of apartments, compared to other cities.
 - The presentation's portrayal of SPSU as having limited housing is inaccurate. SPSU currently provides housing to just fewer than 30 percent of its students and has a 30 percent goal for housing its students. SPSU does not want competing housing.
- Why was the entertainment market not represented as a potential market opportunity?
 - Entertainment uses are a possibility. What was listed in the presentation was a representation of many, but not all, possibilities.
- The student population is small compared to the rest of the market. Is this typical?
 - Students are a sizable portion of the market and will have an impact on what is developed.
- Does the City support the college town image? When will the public have an opportunity to comment on this vision?
 - The City does support promoting a supportive educational environment that is conducive to living, working, and playing.
 - The team is looking at creating an "educational corridor" in this area, not transforming Marietta into a "college town" overall.
 - This meeting and the three that follow as well as the study survey (to be released January 15) are opportunities for community members to participate, have their opinions heard, and help shape the vision for the area.
- Movie theater market – is it accessible to students? Do they know it is there?
 - That is a good question. Marketing of area businesses is an important ingredient to creating a well-connected area.
- How do you connect the historic Marietta core to this area? How is the previous LCI study for downtown being coordinated with this?
 - Trail design is underway.
 - This LCI study incorporates a portion of the previous, Envision Marietta LCI study. The two planning efforts/recommendations are being coordinated.
- Driving time – How is this calculated for the market area?
 - This is determined by the average speed during typical times of the day but not during rush hour. The speed is ultimately determined by the data source.
- Can existing roads accommodate more development on Cobb Parkway?
 - There are long-term plans to widen and add Bus Rapid Transit to Cobb Parkway.
 - Creating more of a live, work, play environment with mixed-use development will also allow for more trips without driving.
- What tools are available for implementation and to facilitate desired development?

- Opportunity zones and tax credits are a couple tools.
- Having a conceptual plan and vision in place will also help spur development.
- Other campuses are located in the study area, including Georgia Highlands, which has between 1000 and 1200 students. This population should not be overlooked.
- Will the study consider eminent domain?
 - No. We are just in the planning stage, and the City's policy prohibits use of eminent domain for economic development.
- Has the economic impact of Lockheed & the Naval Air Reserve Base been studied?
 - Positive economic impact is felt as a result of these resources' proximity to the study area.
 - The two facilities and their existing plans are being considered as a part of the study.

SWOT Discussion

Following Questions/Answers, Amanda Hatton with Jacobs led the group in a brainstorming session on the area's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). Attendees were given a comment form to provide additional input on this activity. Feedback from both the meeting discussion and comment forms are combined below. This input will help inform the next step in the planning process as the team works towards developing a conceptual plan for the area.



Existing conditions displays at Kick-off Meeting

Strengths

- Transportation – major roads, buses
- The two universities – student population
- Easy access to I-75 & US 41
- Lack of competition, market
- Reinvestment is occurring now
- Reverse commute to Marietta is strong
- Missions of the universities, non-traditional
- Dining options, some shopping
- Proximity to Marietta Square
- Proximity to I-75 & I-285
- Near parks and woods
- Brain power
- Location by major highway and arterials
- High traffic area with diverse population.
- Concentration of students/young people
- Educational facilities
- Transit
- Great student population
- Opportunities that students bring

Weaknesses

- Few pedestrian connections
- Lack of sidewalks
- Lack of lighting
- Property on US 41 is expensive
- Lack of sense of place
- Current mix of businesses does not support the vision
- Low income area
- [Large quantity of] renters
- Housing stock
- No pedestrian bridges shown to cross US 41 or 120; no bike lanes shown (transportation rather than just recreation)
- Not enough mixed use on US 41 corridor!
- Lockheed traffic jam limits desirability of that approach corridor
- Not practical to incorporate both sides of US 41 - road may as well be a wall and bridging is not a convenient solution
- Build it [new development] on the west side [of US 41]
- Near Air Reserve Base & Lockheed
- Cobb Parkway is hot, busy, and pedestrian unfriendly and divides Marietta.
- Cobb Parkway and surrounding land uses
- Marketing to students
- Too many apartments already
- Fire Department
- Not enough police
- Low household income
- Lost cost/rent housing in proximity to study area
- It is currently primarily a commuter corridor, connecting outlying areas to downtown Atlanta
- The current business mix is not aesthetically pleasing
- Lighting and walkways are insufficient for foot/bicycle traffic
- Poor housing stock for single family housing
- Lack of development on Cobb Parkway that appeals to a student population or that attracts others to the area
- Lack of identify
- Limited activities for students
- Current “available” property along Cobb Parkway is broken up pretty badly.

Opportunities

- Sense of place in the future (challenge)
- Student festivals and events
- Become a destination
- Incentives (mixed use) and others
- P3 – Public private partnerships
- New zoning – less restrictive
- Interaction between the two universities, internally (resources & trails)
- Commissary on Naval Air Reserve Base
- No resident people, no resident disposable income
- Captured market with the 9,000 students
- Open a student activity area where campuses meet facing US 41 and incorporating the transit stop
- Clothing stores, bar, “Staples”, computer gear, student housing, university sports related, “pizza” shops, job/placement support, police substation, circulator bus stop, movie theater, clinic (doc in a box), incubator business center
- Provide pedestrian and bike-friendly connections to dining, shopping, Marietta Square
- Build walkways across Cobb Pkwy
- Plant more trees on and along Cobb Pkwy
- Walking bridge across Life and SPSU

- Easy connection to MARTA rail from campuses
- Branding: overhead pedestrian crossings across Cobb Parkway – high-profile uniformity/connectivity/identity/perceived expansion/reclamation of campuses
- Mixed use commercial/retail along Cobb Pkwy with higher densities, small retail, and housing choices
- Blank slate; ability to brand
- Closeness or interconnectivity of schools
- There is not much competition for new and unique retail/service businesses, meaning that resident dollars are currently being spent in other communities
- To build a community center/activity/entertainment type campus that could serve both the student population and long-term residents
- Some type of destination attraction like the City Museum in St. Louis - it could be a joint project of the universities and the city and could be what draws people to the area.
- An opportunity to eliminate all the vacant business sites
- Branding
- More cohesiveness
- Connectivity
- Increased pedestrian/bicycle traffic
- Ability to attract “creative class”
- Need to figure [out] ways to take in contingent property along Cobb Parkway as it becomes available with “blocks” of space. It could provide student housing and businesses that support this livable environment.

Threats

- Cobb Parkway/South Marietta Parkway/Delk/I-75 area
- Congestion
- Crime (lack of safety) – need more police presence
- Lighting
- Lockheed
- Financial support for education from State is down
- Trail system along the creek would endanger that ecosystem unless done very carefully
- Business as usual
- Political pressure
- Closure/low-sizing of Lockheed and/or Dobbins affecting many other businesses
- Town within a town – compatible to each other
- Low household income – This continues to decline. Investors do not step in with new housing arts in area east of Fairground and within the loop. Also Franklin Road.
- Changes in major economic drivers – Lockheed, Dobbins, higher education funding
- We should not let the current seeming realities of the economy deter from the vision. Even in the current market realities, much redevelopment seems to be thriving in the surrounding areas.
- Do not see any threats
- Traffic
- Visibility of area
- Lack of identity
- Safety
- Greed of property owners
- Inability of project to have cash to tie up property when it becomes available.
- Signage restrictions and their ability to market [area] hurts: need to allow “digital signage”.

Additional Feedback

In addition to the SWOT analysis above, the following additional feedback was provided via comment forms.

Was this meeting what you expected? Please provide any specific thoughts on today's meeting format as well as any recommendations you may have for future meetings.

- Have we polled Life and SPSU students about demand for on campus/ near campus rental apartments (like KSU)?
- Great meeting space, easy to access, plenty of time for questions and answers, and food.
- All businesses and property owners should be notified of these meetings and kept apprised of status of this project with their input solicited.
- Audience could be better heard with microphone or at least have speakers repeat questions.
- Good meeting.
- I think it was a good introductory meeting.
- The end felt rushed, as we were pressed for time, but I think the overall format was beneficial, and I look forward to the coming meetings.
- Not really.
- Yes, good meeting.
- Boards (displays) could be in same room as presentation.

Other Comments

- Image – drop Smyrna Market Village on US 41 where the campuses meet.
- Study refers to housing as limited. We house 25-30% of the student body, which is considered a residential campus.
- Study does not seem to consider GA Highlands College (1100 students).
- It took Marietta five years to get rid of the mess at I-75 and Franklin Road. No evidence anything will happen.